



## TEACHING HUMAN SEXUALITY IN US UNIVERSITIES

The University of Hawaii, like many universities, is in a peculiar position: human sexuality classes are so popular that we turn away hundreds of students each semester. Yet the Social Science Division has never seriously considered establishing a sexuality program, funding a psychology position for a sexuality researcher, or increasing the number of sexuality classes we teach. Nonetheless, like many of you, I have found ways to make sure I get to teach human sexuality in spite of the fact that "officially" I am only responsible for teaching two social psychology seminars and two classes in advanced research methodology. I suspect that the same "tricks" might work for others. These "tricks" have made teaching a lot more fun for both me and the students.

Let's begin with the research-methods course. On the first day, in describing how students think up hypothesis, design experiments, analyze data, write up projects, etc., I start with a question -- some question about a "hot" topic in sexuality right now. This semester, for example, I asked: "What do you think ... Do you think that "normal" men and women are entitled to have any

sort of wild, outrageous sexual fantasies that they wish, or are there some fantasies that are so "sicko" that they mark someone as bizarre, deviant, a threat to the community?" In Hawaii, many of our students are quite shy. Many come from an Asian community which values grace, respect, and silence. Nonetheless, I suspect that you can guess that in a few seconds the "fantasy" conversation hit all the topics that students love to debate.



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This question sparks cultural considerations such as, "Are daydreams that would be considered bizarre in one culture, normal in another?" Gender considerations arise as well, such as, "Should both women and men be allowed to daydream about anything that increases sexual pleasure, politically correct or not?" Other considerations

include, "Are some fantasies intrinsically unacceptable and dangerous?" "What about sado-masochism, rape and child molestation?" "What about pornography?" "Is there a difference between the soft-porn of say Candida Royalle and hard-core porn and violence/snuff films?" "What happens when we move to cybersex, virtual reality, interactive sex - when someone could actually "practice" preforming taboo activities?"

As you can see, in a few minutes, one can spark students' interests in a variety of research questions and give them the confidence to propose hypotheses of their own. It is an easy move from that to teaching them the basics of experimental design.

I would, of course love it if there were more Human Sexuality programs in US universities. But until that day comes, I think that there are a variety of ways we can inject our own interests into our own classes and consequently, generate an enthusiasm for research and discovery.

Warmest regards,

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